

CONCORDIA ON WORLD STAGE

Delegation of leading scholars and students from Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies journey to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

The annual meeting of the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), the foremost scholarly conference on the study of Israel, draws experts from all corners of the globe to share the latest research findings across a variety of fields. At the milestone 30th annual meeting, held at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Concordia professors and students took centre stage to share big ideas.

“Concordia was the best represented Canadian university,” says Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, and a presenter at the conference. “More importantly, our researchers offered fresh perspectives. Their work was reflective of the Azrieli Institute’s niche – multi-disciplinarity.”

Of seven research papers presented by Concordia thinkers at the conference, topics ranged from representations of Aliya in recent Jewish-Canadian writing to party switching in the Knesset.

Founded in 2011, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies has made Concordia and Montreal a hub for excellence in Israel studies. “We’ve become well known,”

says Yakub Halabi, a professor in the Department of Political Science and research associate at the Institute who was with the delegation in Israel. “People know that we have a big centre here in Montreal. It’s good news for Concordia and great news for the Azrieli Institute.”

Concordia’s growing reputation as a leader in Israel Studies has landed the university the honour of hosting the 31st annual meeting of the AIS, to be held June 1-3, 2015.

“The conference will bring approximately 500 to 600 academics here to present their research,” says Nikolenyi. “It will provide our undergraduate and graduate students as well as post-doctoral fellows with exceptional opportunities.”

Nikolenyi is excited by the theme of the upcoming conference: Sustainable Israel: A Changing Society in the 21st Century. “The focus of the event will bring visibility to the results and achievements of Concordia’s sustainability researchers.”

“Israel Studies is critical,” explains Halabi. “In Middle East Studies, Israel is

understood primarily through its relations with other countries. To really understand Israel and what makes it unique, students must open up that box and see what’s inside. Israel Studies allow us to do that.

Concordia’s Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies aims to draw a bigger picture of Israel. The Institute’s multidisciplinary approach emphasizes the multilingual, multifaceted and highly current nature of Israel Studies.

“There is definitely a growing demand for Israel Studies among curious students,” says Halabi.

Nikolenyi’s take on the popularity of Israel Studies is clear: “Israel is a home to the three major monotheistic religions. The study of Israel is at the heart of the major cultural forces that have shaped Western and Eastern civilizations.”

To learn more about the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association of Israel Studies visit: azrieli-institute.concordia.ca



DAVID J. AZRIELI, LLD 75: A VISIONARY BUILDER AND PHILANTHROPIST

By Alan Shepard, President, Concordia University

The Concordia community mourned the passing on July 9 of a tremendous figure in our university's history: David J. Azrieli. As early as 1975, an honorary doctorate was conferred upon David by Concordia for his commitment to education and his philanthropic initiatives.

In education we sometimes borrow the language of builders to describe what we do: we lay foundations for the future, we build a curriculum. It's a way of attaching permanence to the fundamental human experiences of education, which transforms the lives of many individuals as well as whole communities.

For David, of course, the language of construction was not only a metaphor. His career as a real estate developer changed Montreal and cities across North America, and eventually Israel, where he built some of the largest office projects in the country.

He rose to eminence from humble beginnings. He was born in Poland in 1922, coming of age just as the pillars of the world began to crumble. His country, and then much of his family, vanished in the horrors of Blitzkrieg and the Holocaust.

He found a new country, and then the beginnings of a new family when he married his beloved Stephanie in 1957. He was fiercely devoted to her and their four children — Rafael, Sharon, Naomi and Danna.

David's family, in turn, has been just as energetic in pursuing their father's vision of a world transformable through education. Their belief that education is the cornerstone of a greater humanity found expression through the Azrieli Foundation.

A resilient man, strong in his faith, David never lost touch with the lives and needs of ordinary people, and he continued throughout his life to build a better



David Azrieli, (1922-2014)

society through opportunities for all for higher education.

David's relationship with Concordia grew over time. More than forty years ago a gift from David made it possible for us to offer our first-ever endowed graduate fellowships. These fellowships have fundamentally changed the lives and careers of young researchers committed to making the world a better place.

With David's vision, the support of his family and a \$5 million gift to our university from their foundation, in 2011 Concordia became the proud home of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. The work carried out by its researchers, students and visiting scholars is dedicated to a deeper understanding of Israel across many academic disciplines.

There is no other institute quite like it in Canada, and it made Concordia, at a stroke, a magnet for international scholars in the field.

David's commitment to the value of education was deep, and he knew well that a true scholar never stops learning. It was not surprising that in 1997, he earned a Master's of Architecture degree at Carleton University in Ottawa – a rigorous program which he completed when he was 75 years old and already an entrepreneur with global reach.

We in the education community, at Concordia and beyond, treasure his memory and count ourselves lucky to have been builders alongside him.

PRESERVING CULTURE

Lost Holocaust music sees new life

Francesco Lotoro has dedicated the last 25 years of his life to recovering and performing music composed in concentration camps. If not for his efforts, many of the works he's found would be all but lost. Last spring, Lotoro spoke and performed before a capacity crowd at an event co-hosted by Concordia's Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, the Azrieli Foundation and the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre.

Lotoro's research has led to the preservation of more than 4,000 pieces composed by men and women in concentration camps during World War II, as well as music written by prisoners of war and civilian detainees. The researcher, musician and musicologist explained that when he first started work on the project, he had no idea that it would become so important, or touch the lives of so many.

"You do not understand your mission at the beginning," he said. "You understand it on the road." Lotoro's search has caused him to travel widely, visiting museums and contacting survivors. In one case, he heard of a Polish composer who wrote a five-act opera in a concentration camp in Campagna, near Salerno, Italy. Lotoro followed the story through several countries, until he was finally able to make contact with the man's nephew in South Africa.

As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles, he has found that speaking to their family members is increasingly the norm. "Today is the generation of the sons and nephews. When I started, a lot of survivors were living. Now it's more rare."



Francesco Lotoro, researcher and performer

Marc Wieser, coordinator with the Azrieli Music Project, was proud to bring Lotoro's work to Montreal. "We're involved in preserving stories," he said. "Stories can exist in painting and music and so many different forms. This project is so interesting because here's someone who is documenting testimonials from Holocaust victims and survivors."

For Lotoro, an Italian who converted to Judaism later in life, the project is more than a professional endeavour. He believes it to be a mitzvah. "When you do a mitzvah, you don't think, 'I have to do' or 'I want to do,'" he says. "Mitzvah is mitzvah. You do."

MAZEL TOV!

Norrin M. Ripsman, professor, Department of Political Science, was awarded a prestigious Summer Institute Fellowship at Brandeis University's Schusterman Center for Israel Studies. The Centre is dedicated to promoting exemplary teaching and scholarship in Israeli history, politics, culture, and society. Ripsman joins Professors Nikolenyi and Robinson as alumni of the program.

Our **Montefiore Fellows** this year include Allison Ross, PhD student, Department of Religion and Kristy Rogers, graduate student, Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Ross is investigating 18th- and 19th-century Eastern European *Dybbuk* manifestations, the Jewish phenomenon of possession by a malevolent spirit. She eventually intends to analyze Hebrew archives on the topic in Israel. Rogers is exploring the link between identity and human rights with respect to Palestinian refugees as a stateless people.



Allison Ross



Kristy Rogers



JOIN US

The 31st Annual Association of Israel Studies Conference will be hosted by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies at Concordia University from June 1-3, 2015. Bringing together scholars from around the world, the conference is open to anyone engaged in, or who shares an interest in, scholarly inquiry into Israel.



SAVE THE DATE

SUSTAINABLE ISRAEL: A Changing Society in the 21st Century June 1-3, 2015

Join us for the 31st annual meeting of the Association of Israel Studies (AIS), hosted by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec.

For further details contact:
azrieliinstitute@concordia.ca
or 514-848-2424 ext. 8721

azrieli-institute.concordia.ca

OUT AND ABOUT



Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, addresses Na'amat Canada.

Sharing academic thought with the greater community

Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, has ensured the Institute builds relationships with community organizations by attending and speaking at a variety of non-academic events. Highlights from this year's agenda included:

- The guided lecture and interactive workshop *Knesset Queries and Coalitions: The Peculiar Paths of Israeli Politics – PART 1* at LE MOOD, Montreal's Festival of Unexpected Jewish Learning, Arts and Culture on November 3, 2013
- Guest talk at a Chanukah tea party organized by the Montreal members of the women's movement Na'amat Canada on November 28, 2013
- Lecture on Israel turning 65 to the study group Daled, affiliated with the Shaar Hashomayim congregation of Montreal, on October 20, 2013
- The Yom Hashoah Commemoration at the Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem Synagogue in Côte-St-Luc on April 27, 2014
- The talk *Israeli Politics at a Turning Point: Reflections on Domestic and External Challenges* given to the ladies of Club Balfour, at the YM-YWHA Jewish Community Centre of Montreal on April 30, 2014.

CONCORDIA'S MINOR IN ISRAEL STUDIES

The first and only such undergraduate program in Canada, the 24-credit minor in Israel Studies is designed to complement students' core areas of study with courses in history, political science, religion, literature and language. Launched in 2013 by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, the minor program is unique in its pedagogical approach. It combines three groups of compulsory courses – Hebrew and Arabic language; History and Politics of the Middle East; and Politics and Society of Israel.

The study of modern Israel is a significant focus of the program but other time periods are explored. Students gain proficiency in either Hebrew or Arabic: a student with prior Hebrew proficiency enrolls in Arabic language classes while students with Arabic proficiency take Hebrew. Students of the program may also take advantage of the option for intensive study in Israel.

ADVANCING SOCIETAL KNOWLEDGE OF ISRAEL

Anita Shapira, winner of a J.I. Segal Literary Award

The Azrieli Institute Prize for Best Book in Israel Studies in English or French was awarded to Anita Shapira. An Israel Prize laureate, Shapira has taught and written extensively on 20th-century Jewish history, focusing on various aspects of Zionism and Israeli culture. She is a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute and heads its Nation Station research program. The awards ceremony will take place at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal on Wednesday, November 12, 2014 (5151 Côte-Ste-Catherine Road, info: 514-345-2627, ext. 3017). Presented every two years as part of the J.I. Segal Literary Awards, the Prize for Best Book in Israel Studies is made possible through a collaboration between the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies and the Jewish Public Library.

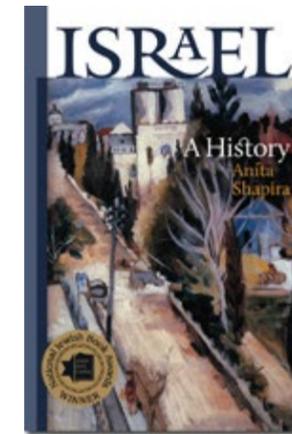
Publications

Professor Csaba Nikolenyi's forthcoming article: "The Constitutionalisation of Party Unity: The Origins of Anti-Defection Laws in India and Israel" will be appearing in the 2015 *Journal of Legislative Studies*, the definitive research periodical on legislatures.

Professor Yakub Halabi, Department of Political Science, authored the article "Democracy, Clan Politics and Weak Governance: The Case of the Arab Municipalities in Israel," which appeared in the *Israel Studies Journal* special section "Arabs as Israeli Citizens" (Spring 2014).

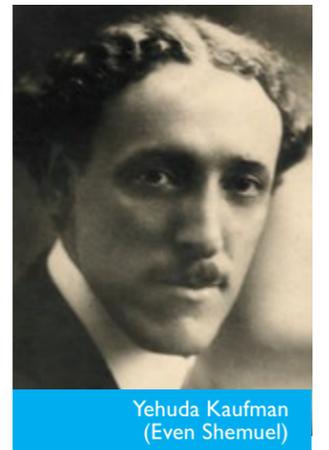
Global Lessons from a Local History of Forced Migration: Northwest Bosnia, 1941

Max Bergholz, assistant professor and holder of the James M. Stanford Professorship in Genocide and Human Rights Studies, presented at *International Conference: Global Conflict and Conflict Management: Israel/Palestine and Beyond*, held at the University of Oxford last May. Bergholz' paper examined the case of the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, and drew a number of theoretical points about the limits and possibilities of resolving "nationality conflicts" more generally, such as that in Israel/Palestine.



Yehuda Kaufman (Even Shemuel): His Life and Intellectual Contribution to Israel, 1927-1976

Ira Robinson, professor, Department of Religion, continues his enquiry into Judaic scholar and Zionist activist, Yehuda Kaufman (1886-1976). The author of three previously published articles on Kaufman's formative years in North America, Robinson is currently focusing his research on Kaufman's work during his Israel period. Yehuda Kaufman's multifaceted career, which illustrates nearly all aspects of the religious and cultural life of 20th-century Jewry, has yet to receive sustained academic attention.



Yehuda Kaufman (Even Shemuel)

Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies associate director Norma Joseph gave the keynote addresses **Balancing Act/Orthodoxy & Feminism: An Activist and Scholar Speaks** and **Food and Identity: Searching for Sephardic Patterns** at the Foundation for Jewish Studies conference in Washington, DC on November 4, 2013. Joseph also gave the keynote address **And Hannah Cried: Women, Prayer and Creating Community** at the Global Day of Jewish Learning in Washington, DC, on November 10, 2013.

Sharing and exchange

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies hosted a group of students from Israel at Concordia's Liberal Arts College on October 17, 2013. The students were visiting Montreal as part of the Israeli program *Generations of Israel*, which aims to bridge the divide between secular and religious in Israel by offering young non-religious Israelis a year of extracurricular courses in Jewish history, religion, Jewish roots and values, public speaking and advocacy. As part of the program students are offered a trip to a diaspora community.



DISCOVERY AND DISCUSSION

Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies events explore the richness and complexity of Israel

Topics are often highly current and the speakers diverse in their expertise. Azrieli Institute events are a forum for ideas and exchange. This year's many attendees gained new insight and opportunities for thoughtful discussion.

October 9, 2013 – Alexander Yakobson, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, gave the talk: *Religion, Zionism and the Israeli national identity*. The event was held with the Departments of Political Science and Religion and Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University.

November 13, 2013 – Moshe Behar, University of Manchester, and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, New York University, hosted an open discussion on: *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish thoughts: Writings on identity, politics and culture, 1893-1958*. The event was held with the Department of Political Science and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

December 10, 2013 - January 14, 2014 – *Unrevealed beauty: The incredible landscapes of the Dead Sea*. This photo exhibit by Duby Tal, one of Israel's leading aerial and landscape photography artists, was made possible with the Montreal Consulate General of Israel.

January 28, 2014 – Naftali Cohn, Concordia University, presented *Archeology and the study of early Rabbinic Judaism*, a slideshow of the ancient places and archaeological artifacts he encountered while in Israel. The presentation was made possible with the Department of Religion.

January 29, 2014 – Oded Haklai, Queen's University, gave the talk: *Democracy and conflict resolution, the dilemmas of Israel's peacemaking*. In collaboration with the Department of Political Science, Haklai's lecture discussed internal influences on Israeli government practices relating to Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.



Signs of ancient times are visible in the archeological ruins of Israel.

January 30, 2014 – Alan Dowty, professor emeritus, University of Notre Dame, gave the talk *Israel and the Middle East: Regional politics in a historical perspective*. This event was held with the Department of Political Science and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs.

March 20, 2014 – *From Ararat to Zion*, a documentary film that follows Armenian pilgrims from Mount Ararat to Mount Zion was screened in collaboration with the Comité National Arménien de Montréal, the Concordia Armenian Students Association, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and the Montreal Consulate General of Israel.

March 24, 2014 – Ehud Eiran, University of Haifa, gave the lecture: *Strategic settlement projects in post-colonial times*. Eiran offered a preliminary effort to explain why and under what conditions a number of states launched settlement projects in contested territories they controlled during the era of decolonization. The event was held with the Department of Political Science.

May 2, 2014 – The *Israeli Scholarship on Jewish Mysticism* lecture series was held with the Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies. Guests included:

- Ronit Meroz, Tel Aviv University: *The roots of kabbalah in the land of Israel and the Middle East*

- Yossi Chajes, University of Haifa: *From the Spheres to the Sephirot: Kabbalah and the visualizing of the Invisible*

- Shannon Hodge, Jewish Public Library of Montreal: *Caring for the physical: The state of the Rosenberg scroll*

- Julie Chajes, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: *The roots of popular contemporary kabbalah: Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society*

May 5, 2014 – Ronit Meroz, Tel Aviv University, gave the talk: *Kabbalah in Safed: Masters, disciples and spiritual practice*, examining the ways 16th-century Safed kabbalists reinterpreted the rituals of the Zohar, the foundational literature on kabbalah. The community-wide event was held with the Jewish Public Library.

May 26, 2014 – Italian pianist and musicologist, Francesco Lotoro, performed and spoke to a capacity audience on recovering music from concentration camps. The community-wide event was held with the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and the Azrieli Foundation.

Sept 9, 2014 – *Hopping Around Israel in a Quick Flight*: the photos of world-renowned Israeli photographer Duby Tal were presented at the Jewish Public Library. The event was co-sponsored by the Montreal Consulate General of Israel.

ISRAEL AT 65

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies' inaugural conference, *Israel at 65 Years: Dimensions of national identity in a divided society*, brought together leading experts in different fields to address today's big challenges and questions.

November 11, 2013 – Israel Studies pioneer Ilan Troen, Stoll Family Professor and Director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, delivered the keynote address *Israel Studies in Israel, North America and Beyond*. Held off-campus at the Gelber Conference Centre, the event was open to the public.

November 12, 2013 – Conference panels at Concordia:

Cultural diversity - Israeli responses – chair: Meir Amor, Concordia University

- Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, New York University: *The black hole of labor division in modern Israel*

- Claris Haboun, McGill University: *Women breaking the law – Breaking with silence, redefinition of women's lawbreaking and resistance to injustices: From lawbreaking to lawmaking*

- Liora Norwich, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies post-doctoral fellow: *Examining the challenges of ethnic minority mobilization in Israel and Canada: A relational approach*

Religion and the state – chair: Michael Oppenheim, Concordia University

- Maya Katz Balakirsky, Touro College and University System: *Building a secular temple of arts in Jerusalem*

- Mordecai Inbari, University of North Carolina: *Messianic religious Zionism confronts Israeli territorial compromises*

- Ira Robinson, Concordia University: *The religion of the average Israeli Jew*

CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S ACADEMIC LEADERS

The inaugural **Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies Faculty-Graduate Student Seminar Series** provided a professional forum for graduate students to share their findings with peers:

- **February 11, 2014** – *New perspectives on Israel and the environment*; Randy Pinsky, graduate student, Department of Political Science: *Water wars in the Middle East: Inevitable reality or unsubstantiated hype?*; Marion Achoulias, PhD student, Department of Religion: *Environmentalism in contemporary Israel*



Jerusalem, a city reflecting the fervour and piety of multiple faiths

The making (and re-making) of a national culture – chair: Bina Freiwald, Concordia University

- Khezia Alon, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: *Oriental (Mizrahi) Israeli poetry – basic lines*

- Amit Assis, McGill University: *The singer-songwriter's persona as a workshop of identity: The case of Ehud Banai*

- Smadar Sheffi, Hebrew University of Jerusalem: *Milk, blood and honey – Contemporary art from Israel*

Israel's Future History – chair: Csaba Nikolenyi, Concordia University

- Moshe Behar, University of Manchester: *Should Israel remain fearful and scornful of cultural Semitism, Easternism and Arabism?*

- Yakub Halabi, Concordia University: *Israel: the political economy of a weak government within a strong state*

- **March 11, 2014** – Historical and current security challenges; Daniel Douek, professor, Department of Political Science: *Lebanon 1982: Turning point of the Arab-Israeli conflict*; Alon Burstein, master's student, Department of Political Science: *The armies of God and men: Israel's struggle with Palestinian extremism*

- **April 8, 2014** – *The faces of Zionism: A historical perspective*; Claire English, graduate student, Department of Religion: *Disabling bodies in the new Israel*; Ming Hui Pan, graduate student, Department of Religion: *The different face of Zionism in Russia and the U.S.*



WHY ISRAEL STUDIES?

Highlights from the keynote address at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies inaugural conference

By Randy Pinsky, MA in Public Policy and Public Administration, research assistant, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

In a conversation with American President Harry Truman, Israel's first President Chaim Weizmann once remarked: "No other state has been studied as much as Israel." So began Ilan Troen's keynote address, *Israel Studies in Israel, North America and Beyond*, at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies inaugural conference, *Israel at 65 Years: Dimensions of National Identity in a Divided Society*.

Troen, director of Brandeis University's Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, has been a pioneer in developing Israel studies programs throughout North America, as well as in Uzbekistan, India and China. United by a fascination for an ancient people's successful transition to the modern world, such programs explore the relationship of the present-day state with the legacy of the past.

Traditionally, scholars have been interested in Israel from a Jewish or Middle Eastern context, as opposed to the modern political context; a situation that has changed dramatically over the

years. Troen explained, "as the children and grandchildren of the dreamers started to live in the dream, they wanted to examine this 'utopia'. What really happened? Which dreams came to fruition? Which didn't? And why?"

Contrary to the assumption that history of Israel was first written by the academic society, Troen argued that it was actually first compiled by the general populace. Faced with growing changes and geopolitical challenges, however, politics began to drive the direction and tone of scholarship.

For instance, while writings in the 1960s were favourable to Israel, an increasing crescendo of criticism began to develop following the 1967 Six-Day War. Analysts and social scientists exposed problems and delved into the Arab-Israeli conflict, compelling a rethinking of the former celebrationist view. "Things that were once believed to be untouchable and sacred were all of a sudden open for scrutiny."

Troen also pointed out that the majority



World-renowned Israel Studies scholar, Ilan Troen

of the initial international writings about Israel were in fact in English rather than in Hebrew. The difficulty that resulted was that the English language simply does not lend itself well to expressing certain nuances central to Israel's identity.

For example, there is no English equivalent for the Hebrew word 'ahm' (state, people), a reference evidenced in the collective focus of Israel's Declaration of Independence compared to its individual-centric American counterpart. More than a mere "multitude of individuals," there is no English equivalence that accurately conveys the Hebrew understanding of 'ahm' as a collective, a nation, a people.

Israel Studies programs now include a great variety of fields, and are increasingly being recognized for their interdisciplinary nature. Through the development of programs outside of Israel, Troen believes Israel Studies within Israel will be greatly enriched.



US President Harry Truman with Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann

FACULTY SNAPSHOT

Bina Toledo Freiwald, professor, Department of English



Bina Toledo Freiwald

Following a post-doctoral fellowship at Stanford University in 1984, Bina Freiwald returned to Montreal, her second home, to join Concordia's Department of English. She is a member of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture and the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. Freiwald is a specialist in critical theory, contemporary women's writing, identity discourses, and has written on questions of nation and narration in Israel/Palestine.

Question: How has your personal background influenced your areas of research?

Answer: I was born and raised in Israel. I was part of the first generation born after Israel became a state. The complexities of Israel – both internal and in relation to its place in the Middle East – continue to be a major area of interest for me both professionally and personally.

Q: What kind of courses do you teach?

A: I teach courses in critical theory, women's writing across a range of genres, historical periods and different national literatures, as well as courses on gender and sexuality and autobiographical narratives.

Q: Do you think your work is a good demonstration of the very cross-disciplinary nature of Israel studies?

A: Yes, I believe that's true. My published research has drawn on scholarship in sociology, political, theory and psychology, for example, in order to explore identity from a variety of angles, whether it's an essay on transsexual belonging in Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*, or on gender and the making of a national identity in women's autobiographical writing in Israel/Palestine.

Q: What are you working on at the moment?

A: My current research project is entitled, "The Diaspora's Homeland: Representations of Israel in Contemporary Jewish-Canadian Writing."

Q: You recently developed an innovative graduate course called *Nation and Narration*. Can you tell us a bit about it and where the inspiration for it came from?

A: The course reflects my ongoing interest in questions of identity, both individual and collective. The course draws on a multidisciplinary perspective to explore how the concept of national identity has been articulated over time. We look at the views of both proponents and opponents of nationalism, and examine how characters in fiction experience their relation to the nation in works from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to a contemporary novel by Jewish-Canadian writer David Bezmozgis, *The Free World*, in which a group of Russian émigrés grapple with what Israel and Jewishness mean to them.

Q: What do you look forward to most about the start of a new school year?

A: Every September, I look forward with great excitement to the new groups of students in my classes, both undergraduate and graduate. I am excited at the prospect of the thought-provoking and deeply rewarding conversations I know will unfold throughout the year. I feel privileged to be part of such a dynamic and vital process.



FACULTY SNAPSHOT

Meir Amor, associate professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology



Meir Amor

Originally from Israel, Meir Amor was recruited by Concordia's Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 2000 and joined the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies in 2011. He studies the history of the politics of inclusion and exclusion and violence. His research also examines Middle East history and modern realities regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Question: What do you see as your primary objective as a professor of sociology?

Answer: Making students stop, think and wonder about their everyday life experiences; asking why are the arrangements around us the way they are? I want students to think about the "is" as

a possibility not an inevitable necessity. The relationship between the "is," the "ought," and the "possible" are for me at the centre of my teaching philosophy. Whenever I am able to make anyone and especially my students utter the big aha, I feel extremely rewarded.

Q: What are your specializations?

A: Race and ethnic relations, or ethnic "oppressions," modernity studies and violence, citizenship and nationalism.

Q: What are you currently researching related to Israel studies?

A: I'm looking at the developments among various intellectual dissenting voices of Israeli society, culture and politics.

Q: You and your students navigate complex topics that can be contentious or controversial. How do you maintain a neutral and open discussion?

A: I see my role as a provider of a reasoned and fair context in which meaningful debate can take place. University life and class performance is about reasoned and dialogical exchange of ideas among students and between students and professors. Fairness means not only the opportunity to express one's opinion and feeling, but also the unswerving demand to root arguments in logic and observation while respecting others' opinions.

Q: Academic research can be a daunting endeavour. What should young researchers keep in mind when facing some of the hurdles that accompany rigorous academic study?

A: Personal involvement is the secret to productive and genuine academic engagement. When personal interest and involvement are there, most struggles and the majority of difficulties can be surmounted. Originality and self-discovery are a *sine qua non*. Without involving one's personality and personal story and path, one can hardly achieve that feeling of self-discovery, self-enlightenment and originality.

Q: What's the best advice you've received as a student or as a teacher?

A: Be yourself; be curious!

GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT



Message from Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

It has been a busy and exciting year for the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. Our research profile has grown steadily, as has the number of full-time faculty members developing new and promising research. As a result, an ever-increasing number of bright graduate students look to our innovative programs and facilities to further their studies.

Thanks to the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Concordia was the best-represented Canadian university at the annual meeting of the Association for Israel Studies, held last June at the Sde Boker campus of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. An impressive seven papers were presented by the Concordia delegation at the conference. Our professors and graduate students have also presented their work at several other prestigious venues, including the European Association of Israel Studies in London.

Our graduate students maintain a vibrant and stimulating research culture. This past academic year, they organized a faculty-graduate seminar series to showcase their work in a variety of disciplines.

Due to our growing reputation, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies received a considerable number of requests and applications for visiting opportunities from junior, mid-career and established senior scholars. In 2014-15, Yakub Halabi, PhD from the University of Denver, will be a visiting research associate and we plan to make several short-term appointments in 2015-16.

Finally, we maintain our sights on June 1-3, 2015, which will mark a pivotal moment for the Institute as we host the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies. This forum for cutting-edge research represents not only a golden opportunity for our Institute but also for Concordia University and the Montreal community. We hope you can join us!

Csaba Nikolenyi
Professor, Department of Political Science
Director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

Message from Norma Joseph, associate director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

The past academic year brought new and stimulating opportunities to Concordia students and faculty involved in Israel Studies. In addition to hosting several distinguished guest lecturers, we also launched our minor in Israel Studies.

Reflecting our unique multidisciplinary approach, the minor blends a core of courses designed to introduce students to Israel Studies and its diverse fields of study. It will equip our students with the skills and knowledge necessary for a critical and reflective approach to the study of Israel.

The new minor emphasizes the importance of studying Israel as part of the broader regional, political, social and cultural context within the Middle East. One exceptional aspect of its curriculum is a language requirement in either Hebrew or Arabic.

Thanks to the **Ruth and David Steinberg Prize for Hebrew Language Studies**, we sent our first graduate student to an Israeli ulpan, where she was immersed in Hebrew for the summer. To ensure the continuity of our robust Hebrew program, both beginner and intermediate courses will be offered this coming year.

New and existing courses have enriched educational opportunities on campus. *City of Jerusalem: Ideas and Images*, an Art History course offered by Professor Loren Lerner is one notable example. The course has grown to include the *Jerusalem Art History Journal*, showcasing the best undergraduate student papers and artwork. This journal will go online by the end of fall 2014. It will continue to provide a vehicle for our students' work.

Our first faculty-graduate student seminar series offered a platform to students who had received grants from the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies to share their research with peers.

The sum total of our academic and educational pursuits is inspiring. We look forward to continued growth and discovery over the coming year.

Norma Joseph
Professor, Department of Religion
Associate Director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies



ABOUT US

The **Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies** unites students and scholars across disciplines in drawing a bigger picture of Israel, its languages, religions, rich history and evolving culture. Its researchers aim to advance how society understands the multifaceted Middle Eastern state by sharing knowledge that benefits Montreal, Quebec, Canada and the world.

Founded in 2011, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies was born thanks to a visionary gift of \$5 million from the Azrieli Foundation to Concordia University. Today, the Institute serves as fertile and neutral ground for stimulating discovery and discussion. For more information, please visit **azrieli-institute.concordia.ca**.

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A contribution to the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies is a gift towards education and research. Help us advance knowledge on the State of Israel by giving to Concordia.

To support the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, please contact our development staff:

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